

Gayarré, Charles Etienne Arthur.
[Letter to the Washington
Union --- 20, 7]

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NEW YORK, October 23, 1854.

To the Editor of the Washington Union.

SIR,

UNDER the pretext of subjecting to literary criticism "The School for Politics," a Dramatic Novel, written by me, and published by Messrs. Appleton & Co., of New York, the "Louisiana Courier" of the 4th inst. has thought proper to indulge in the following personal strictures.

"We should have seen (speaking of me) a man of aristocratic habits, priding himself on his illustrious descent, yet nominally attached to the Democratic party; and seeking station and influence through his association with a party which he in reality despised, and only wanted an occasion to betray. We should have seen a man who, when elected to the United States' Senate, renounced, in a few weeks, the trust that had been confided to him, and sought the more congenial shores of Europe, in order to be free from intercourse with a people among whom he declared no gentleman could live. We should have seen a man who, returning from foreign travel, again became a follower, and aspired to be a leader of the people he had abandoned and ridiculed; a man who sought to use a generous and confiding party for the advancement of his own ambitious views, and deserted and denounced it when his own arrogance and vanity had caused his defeat before a convention of political friends."

If this tissue of calumnies, some of which are so grossly absurd that they seem to have been written in the very delirium of impotent rage and malignity, had been permitted to rot where it had been woven, and to remain buried in the columns of the "Courier," whose circulation hardly extends beyond the limits of the city of New Orleans, where

the slanderer and the slandered are so well known, any attempt at refutation on my part would have implied an excess of humility of which I am incapable. But what was unworthy of notice in the "Louisiana Courier," claims my attention in your journal. My answer to the charges brought against me will be as brief as possible, and will consist merely in a statement of facts which can be easily ascertained, and which, I believe, no one will have the hardihood to deny, after investigation.

I am sure you will understand how painful it is for a man possessed of proper delicacy of feelings, thus to enter into an analysis of his own life. But the task has been forced upon me; and, should it compel me to disclose facts of too flattering a nature, and which, otherwise, would never have been revealed, be it remembered that it is to be attributed, not to any boastful disposition for which I should be the first to blame myself, but to the necessity of defence against the "Courier's" attack, when reproduced by you. Here are the facts.

In July, 1830, a few months after my return from Philadelphia, where I had passed three years in the study of law, I was elected a representative of the city of New Orleans in the State Legislature. Although a bare youth at the time, I stood, if my recollection serves me right, at the head of the ticket composed of such men as Judge Workman and others, and I received almost the whole vote polled. This was, certainly, far more than I deserved. But, although a Democrat, it is evident that it was not as such that I was elected, and that I was not indebted for it to the party. On that occasion, the whole body of my fellow-citizens, and no party whatever, became entitled to my gratitude.

Shortly after, I accepted the office of Deputy Attorney General, *tendered* to me by a Whig Attorney General, with expressions of such personal respect and on such terms as to make the offer an honor which commanded acknowledgment.

Subsequently, Governor Roman, a Whig, *tendered* to me, and I accepted, the office of Presiding Judge of the City Court of New Orleans, although I had never wavered in my democracy. For the proof of personal esteem thus given to me by that gentleman, I have ever since remained grateful. If this demonstrates that I possessed *station and influence* (to use the "Courier's" phraseology), it is incontestable that it was not through association with any party. Much less had I *sought* office through the *instrumentality of party*, according to time-honored precedents, well known to the "Courier;" but office was brought home to me through the friendly partiality of political adversaries, despite the too strict allegiance to party with which I was often reproached.

In 1835, the Legislature was Whig, and no Democrat could be elected to the Senate of the United States without obtaining three Whig votes. There was a host of aspirants, who were more deserving than myself of support, and who had rendered more services to the Democratic cause than I had. I happened to be taken up by the Democratic party, because it was discovered that I was the only Democrat who, on personal grounds, could get three Whig votes. It was under such circumstances that I was elected a United States' Senator for six years, when barely possessing the constitutional age. But, Sir, do I violate the rules of logical deduction when I remain under the impression that, on that occasion, it was not through my

association with a party, and through the deliberate and free support of that party, that I became a Senator? On the contrary, it was through the disinterested and personal devotion of three Whig friends, who thereby incurred the vituperation of their party, and only got in return the ineffectual gratitude of one from whom they knew that they could not receive, and never expected or claimed, any political favor.

When thus elected, I had been for many years in declining health, as physicians and many other witnesses can testify. I immediately departed for New York, and the medical advice I took in that city was so unfavorable, that I determined to visit Europe before the meeting of Congress. When in Paris, three of its most eminent physicians, Andral, Louis, and Marjolin, gave in writing a joint opinion, in which they declared that my health was such as to preclude my return to the United States. I sent this opinion to Mr. Alcée Labranche, my friend and agent in New Orleans, who handed it to Governor Roman, together with my resignation. Dr. Picton, who had been my physician before my departure for Europe, applied for that document, in which he took a very natural interest as a man of science, got it from the archives of the State, and kept it several years in his possession. Where is the blame to be attached to me in all this? In the interval, there had been State elections, the Legislature had become Democratic, and, when I resigned, it was only to make way for one of my party. It was not for the motive alleged by the "Courier," and on free-will, but on compulsion, that I abandoned the trust reposed in me. Nor did I injure the party by resigning, and the "Courier" himself will admit despite his natural obliquity still more distorted by the

fierceness of his hatred, that but for my three Whig friends, and but for me, the Democratic party in Louisiana would not, in 1835, have had a representative in the Senate of the United States for a term of six years.

If I remained eight years in Europe, it was not to idle away in the excellent and exalted society among which the "Courier" does me the honor to suppose that I moved. But, although I continued in feeble health for a long time, I prepared the materials, for that History of Louisiana to which I have devoted fifteen years of my life, and which I have published in three volumes. I hope the "Courier" will permit me to hazard the expression, without being taxed with *vanity and arrogance*, that my labors have been as meritorious and patriotic as his editorial lucubrations, and that they have been far more disinterested, since I might have employed my time more profitably in the pursuit of fat jobs and offices, through that instrumentality of party which others have so skilfully wielded.

In 1844, a few months after my return from Europe, it seems that, notwithstanding the manifestations of my ancestral pride and my aristocratic associations, as depicted by the "Courier," I had not lost the confidence of the Democratic party, since I was elected to the State Legislature, therein to represent the city of New Orleans, and was again re-elected in 1846. On both these occasions, I expressed freely my sentiments in public speeches which were reproduced by the "Courier" with much applause. If this was seeking *station and influence*, it was at least in broad daylight, and from the people collectively. But that man lives not who can say that I *sought* his individual vote by personal address, or that he ever saw me canvassing where such things are usually done. It is possible that, after several

years' reflection, the "Courier" has come to the conclusion, that this deportment of mine was aristocratic. Be it so ; but I am not one of those who think that the character of a Democrat and that of a gentleman are necessarily incompatible.

In 1846, Governor Johnson *tendered* me the office of Secretary of State, which I *refused at first*, and which I accepted only when he put it on the footing of assistance to the party and personal favor to himself. Whilst I was Secretary of State, he *offered* me the office of Superintendent of Public Education, which I *refused*, and also the judicial seat vacated by the death of Judge Canon, which I *declined*.

Gov. Walker, who succeeded Gov. Johnson, again *tendered* me the office of Secretary of State, which I *also declined*, but which I finally consented to fill, only when he appealed to the friendly feelings I had for him, and on his permitting me to make conditions to which, with his usual kindness, he readily assented. To Gov. Johnson and to Gov. Walker I am grateful for these high testimonials of personal confidence. But I did not *seek* the office which I occupied seven years under their successive administrations, and one of my reasons for consenting to take it was my being given to understand that I was *helping the party*.

Gov. Walker, on the resignation of Judge Preston, *tendered* me, through Mr. Sigur, the seat vacated on the bench of the Criminal Court of New Orleans, which, subsequently, was so worthily filled by Judge Larue. I *declined*.

It is well known that I might, if I had chosen, have been twice nominated as candidate for Lieutenant Governor, first when Isaac Johnson, and next when Joseph Walker, ran for Governor, and were elected. I *twice refused* with a pertinacity for which I even incurred some reproach.

Who will deny that I have frequently been upbraided for not making the proper exertions to secure from the democratic party my nomination as candidate for the office of Governor, and that I have invariably declared, verbally and in writing, that I might accept, but would not *seek*, that exalted position?

Messrs. Mouton, Johnson, and Walker, occupied the gubernatorial chair in Louisiana for a consecutive period of ten years, and yet, although they were my intimate friends, it is well known that I never applied for those lucrative offices which I saw so ardently coveted by others.

Such was the course pursued by the man whom the Courier accuses of *seeking to use a generous and confiding party for the advancement of his own ambitious views!* What justification can there be on the part of the Courier for this execrable misrepresentation, in the presence of facts which can be too easily established to permit even the shadow of a doubt to rest on their authenticity? Can personal hostility, heated to the very highest degree of madness, betray human nature into such a parade of wilful degradation?

On every presidential election, I have invariably taken the field and canvassed the State at my own expense, and not with funds furnished by the Democratic party, and yet there is not on record in any of the departments at Washington any application of mine for a *share in the spoils*.

The first time I have ever desired any thing from the General Government, was shortly after the inauguration of General Pierce, when it was thought that the mission to Spain, to which the Courier sneeringly alludes, being supposed to be destined to the South, might with propriety be given to me. But let the Courier be informed that, on that

occasion, I was faithful to my antecedents. I did not *use the party* (to adopt the phraseology of the Courier), and did not curry any recommendation from the Legislature, or from any other source whatever in Louisiana; and at Washington the matter was left altogether with our two Senators, and about half a score of gentlemen whose exalted position entitled them, I thought, to have weight with the Executive. I cannot forget the manner in which they expressed themselves to me on that occasion, and I must ever cherish the recollection of their good opinion. High influence was offered me to procure any thing else which I might desire, and I respectfully *declined*. The mere ambition for office would have been satisfied with what it could get. If I was guilty of vanity in thinking that I had a peculiar fitness for the position in which I wished to be placed, I hope I shall not be blamed with too much severity, when it is recollected that I was encouraged in my delusion by those whose judgment was entitled to respect. Nor does it seem that I had not some good grounds to hope, for the Courier will remember the manner in which the news of my appointment was received in Louisiana and elsewhere, when it was erroneously announced in the papers. I was told that both parties joined in the unanimity of their approbation, and that even my personal enemies expressed sentiments highly creditable to themselves and to me. I am willing to take the Courier's own statement on the subject, and stand corrected by him, if I have been led into error.

The position I take, sir, after what I have stated above, is, that I have never used the democratic party for any purpose of my own; that having never *sought any favor* from it, none could ever be refused or granted; that, such

being the case, the democratic party never has had the opportunity to give me any cause of complaint, and that it is evidently impossible that I should have any reason whatever to be discontented with its appreciation of what merits I may possess.

It is a remarkable fact that, from 1830 to 1853—a period of twenty-three years—I had been invariably lauded by the Courier as an unflinching and consistent Democrat, to whom no reproach could be addressed. But last year, I chose, with the approbation of the majority of the Democratic party, as I thought, to denounce a *clique* who were breaking it down by using it for their own selfish and ambitious views. I was not *defeated before a convention of political friends*, as the Courier says, but I peremptorily refused to allow my name to be laid before the Convention, although some of our most influential leaders had given me the assurance that its verdict would be in my favor, if I appeared at its bar and recognised its jurisdiction, and I will give the Courier every facility to ascertain the truth of this assertion if he pleases.

I was not *defeated* before that convention, because I did not permit my name to be brought before it, and therefore not a solitary vote was given either for or against me. But I determined to run as an independent Democratic candidate, for reasons which I published, and which remained without even an *attempted answer*. I further declared in every newspaper, that I would withdraw from the field if there could be found twelve men bold enough to maintain publicly that my *assertions were not true*. Not a solitary individual, not even the Courier, ventured to come out with a denial, which would have required a degree of shamelessness of which none seemed willing to assume the odium at

the time. The day of election came, and on the 7th of November, 1853, if I was defeated as an independent candidate for Congress in the First Congressional District, it was only by the fabrication of about two thousand spurious votes. I denounced the stupendous fraud in a pamphlet which produced great sensation in the State, and I brought charges which no one dared to contradict. When the bill of indictment was read by me, the silence of the culprits proved the extent of the guilt. It is too late, at this eleventh hour, to raise an issue from which, at the time, it was thought wisdom to shrink.

I throw down the gauntlet, and I defy any man in Louisiana to show, when and where I have ceased to be a consistent Democrat. I fearlessly and emphatically aver that there is not one act of my political life which admits of equivocation or doubtful construction, whilst in the small nest of those who arraign my democracy, there may be more than one who cannot show such a clean bill of health. In a few words, here is the truth, and it is in vain that the *Courier* attempts to throw a veil over it. The truth is, I have refused allegiance to a *clique* in the party, and not to the party itself, and it is as ridiculous in them to say that I have thereby betrayed the party, as it would be on my part to maintain that they have denounced it by denouncing me and my friends. The contest is a fair and open one between us, and the party, so far as its sovereignty is implicated, has nothing to do with it, except deciding on which side is disinterestedness, capacity, and indifference to office, or selfishness, greediness, corruption, and incapacity.

In conclusion, I beg leave to say to the *Courier*, through your columns, that I receive his abuse with the same smile of equanimity with which I endured his praise. Hoping

that it may not again be my misfortune to correct in your journal any misstatement you may inadvertently copy from the Louisiana Courier, and to which you may thus give some momentary importance, I remain, &c.,

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES GAYARRÉ.



